Christian Community

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THE CHURCH IN THE COMMUNITY

By F. Nelsen Schlegel

One of the goals suggested for a congregational program of Christian Commitment and Christian Community is to determine what the total parish responsibility is, and to find ways by which that responsibility may be more effectively met. Elsewhere in this issue of *Christian Community* is an article describing a St. Louis church program which goes a long way toward achieving this goal. But notice the way that article closes: "After five years in our program a study committee met last night, to begin objectively looking at ourselves again."

This is the key to an effective community witness: "to begin objectively looking at ourselves again." The church is in a community; it is an important part of the community; but it can never be satisfied with it, nor with the part it has to play in giving a Christian witness there.

It would be a useful exercise for every congregation, big or small, and wherever located, to take some time every year for a review of its community outreach, and to establish goals toward which to work: goals in evangelism, and also in respect to the social impact of the congregation's Christian witness.

The evangelism imperative is ever before us. More and more churches are realizing the obligation to "widen the circle of the committed," and that there must be an *inclusive* evangelism if we are to be true to our Lord's Commission. Inner city churches, whose older members in large part are becoming less active in the church or move away, find it necessary constantly to study their neighborhoods, not only in search of new members, but also in efforts to find ways by which the church can serve these new neighbors' needs. And their needs and problems may differ greatly from those of older members who lived for many years in the same houses.

In a little folder on "The Church Learning about Its Community," published by the Department of Social Welfare of the United Christian Missionary Society, appears a paragraph which describes the challenge every church faces: the church, the article says, "must strengthen the spiritual resources of the individual, it must protect the family and eliminate conditions which undermine family life; it must become the active ally of those forces which seek to re-integrate life upon a sounder and better basis; it must eradi-

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Part of Zion's Changing Community

The Church Serves A Changing Community

By Laverne E. Ebert

Zion Evangelical and Reformed Church finds its location in the blighted housing area of St. Louis' inner city to be a challenge to its talents, consciences, and pocket books. Eighty-seven years of age, most of its members scattered in all directions, the church has long passed the daring inspiration of building a new church, the growing pains of a young congregation in a new community, and has entered an era of church life less glamorous outwardly and as yet unsung, but equally full of opportunity for Christian service to mankind.

We believe that only as people of our community become committed to Christ, and find fellowship with each other in Him, can they attain wholeness of life. Our community program is not thought of as separate from the total life of Zion church, but as a necessary function of her total witness to Christ. By study of the relation of our church to the community, we found that we live in an area where all aspects of the "Favorability Key" are least favorable or below average—housing, occupations, delinquency, old age assistance, social organization, infant death rate, to mention only a few.

Our older youth, the leadership of many churches, have mostly moved from the community of Zion to raise their families in healthier surroundings. While they move out to join and become active members of more conveniently located congregations, many of their parents remain loyal to Zion, the church of *their* youth, and return occasionally or regularly even from great distances to worship here. These commuters comprise about half of the Sunday congregation, and about two-thirds of the budget of the church.

In direct contrast with this older and "old member" group, are the present inhabitants of our community. They

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NEWS NOTES

A number of Evangelical and Reformed churchmen took an active part September 28 and 29 in a Pennsylvania Council of Churches World Order Conference held at Bedford. Leaders in the plenary sessions of the conference were Drs. O. Frederick Nolde, Walter Van Kirk, and Harold Bosley. To Dr. Charles Zweizig, pastor of Salem Evangelical and Reformed Church in Allentown and chairman of the Pennsylvania Council's Committee on Christian Social Action, falls the job of compiling the recommendations for implementing the conference which grew out of the five workshops in which the 150 delegates participated. Among the recommendations was one to the effect that churches make use of the resources available for a program of adult education by calling on denominational leaders and college and university men for leadership in discussions regarding the church and world affairs.

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From all sections of the Church come reports of congregations which are effectively using or adopting the materials suggested for the Emphasis on Christian Commitment and Christian Community. A unique cooperative project has been undertaken in Elmhurst, Illinois, where the First Congregational Church is working with Bethel and St. Peter's Evangelical and Reformed Churches. Each congregation is following the suggested themes in the Sunday morning services. On Sunday evening all three congregations are uniting at St. Peter's for discussion of the recommended study topics. Leaders of these meetings include the Reverend Messrs. Lawrence A. Gedcke, Merl Schiffman, Edwin J. A. Koch, pastors of the three congregations respectively; the Reverend Clarence McCall, Associate Superintendent of the Chicago Congregational Union, and the Reverend Robert D. Brodt, pastor of Peace Memorial Church, Chicago.

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At the request of the General Council Christian Commitment and Christian Community was made the theme of the fall synod meetings. A turn-over chart with script prepared by the staffs of the cooperating agencies was presented in each fall meeting by the zonal representative of the Commission on Stewardship, Evangelism, Christian Social Action, or the Women's Guild. The opening devotions and concluding commitment service also carried through this theme.

STUDYING YOUR COMMUNITY

A minimum study of the community from the standpoint of the Church would include such questions as the following:

1. **WHAT IS YOUR COMMUNITY?** What is the extent and what are the boundaries of your natural geographical "parish"? What are its chief characteristics? To what extent is it residential, commercial, industrial, agricultural? What are its traditions and significant action patterns?

2. **WHO LIVES HERE?** How many people are there? What is the density of the population, its economic, ethnic, sex, and educational distribution? How long have the residents lived here? How fast are they moving in or out?

3. **WHAT KINDS OF HOMES DO PEOPLE LIVE IN?** What percentage of the families own their own homes? What do these homes cost? What is the cost and condition of rental housing? Is there overcrowding? How many people per room? Are there hotels, rooming houses, trailer camps, and other facilities which mean transiency? Is there need for slum clearance and low-cost housing?

4. **WHAT IS THE ECONOMIC CHARACTER OF THE COMMUNITY?** What is the income range of the people? How do they make their living? What problems do they face in their daily work? What is the relation between labor and management, businessman and consumer, farmer and townsman? Is any economic group insufficiently represented in the leadership of the churches?

5. **WHAT ARE THE SCHOOLS LIKE?** What sort of educational facilities are provided? What standards prevail? What are the chief needs or problems of the schools? Are equal privileges open to all children of the community without discrimination? What opportunities for education are offered to adults and young people after they leave school?

6. **HOW IS THE COMMUNITY GOVERNED?** What is the status of law enforcement and the administration of justice? What are the facts about crime and delinquency? What provision is made for the treatment and rehabilitation of offenders? What measures are taken, or needed, to prevent delinquency? How fully do citizens participate in the processes of government?

7. **HOW DO PEOPLE SPEND THEIR LEISURE?** What facilities for recreation are there? Are they accessible to all citizens of the community? Is there sufficient variety of play opportunities for all age groups? What kinds of commercial amusement exist? Do these offer acceptable entertainment under wholesome conditions? What deficiencies and evils exist?

8. **WHAT IS THE STATE OF THE COMMUNITY'S HEALTH?** Who gets sick, and why? What are the birth and death rates per thousand? What provision is made for treating contagious disease? for improving mental health? for the care of mothers and children? for public health?

9. **HOW DO WE DEAL WITH PEOPLE IN TROUBLE?** What kinds of problems cause the greatest amount of difficulty? What welfare agencies are there to give help? What special needs are not being met? Do churches and ministers work closely with social workers and welfare agencies?

10. **HOW DO MEMBERS OF MINORITY GROUPS GET ALONG?** What racial, national, and cultural groups are represented? Is there discrimination or segregation in schools, hospitals, courts, places of entertainment? Are there equal opportunities for housing, police protection, employment and advancement in employment? Is there evidence of tension or misunderstanding between minority and majority group or between minorities? What opportunities exist for

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STUDYING YOUR COMMUNITY

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inter-racial fellowship and cooperation in community concerns? What minority groups are included in the membership, program, and outreach of our church?

11. **IS THE COMMUNITY AWARE OF THE LARGER COMMUNITY?** Are its citizens informed of state, national, and international developments? What response does it give to national causes and appeals? What organizations and institutions promote good citizenship, political action, and education about world affairs?

12. **WHO IS MEETING THE EXISTING NEEDS OF THE COMMUNITY?** What are the organizations and institutions at work in the community? What churches are there, and what are they doing? In what ways do they cooperate in meeting community needs? What has our church done to serve these community needs?

Having considered the above questions, the congregation will ask itself

☆ **WHAT IS OUR COMMUNITY RESPONSIBILITY?** In the light of the available information and the resources at our disposal, what is our obligation? What specific community ministry shall our congregation explore further and undertake **now?**

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cate those evils which exploit the weaknesses of people — alcohol, narcotics, gambling, low standards of sex morality. It must strengthen the educational forces and use its influence to make available to every member of the community a decent income, decent standards of living, decent housing. It must defend civil and religious liberties, not simply for its own protection, but in defense of the rights of all. It must promote friendship, goodwill and understanding at home and abroad, and must with its own body build a bulwark against encroaching doctrines that subjugate the individual and make him the slave or the victim of the social group. Finally, it must stand as a mediator between man and man, and group and group, lifting them all to the throne of Divine Grace."

If the program of the church is to be related to the ongoing life of a community in so many important ways there must be some organized effort to discover how this can be done. It is impossible to expect the level of community life to be lifted unless the church will take steps to exert a Christian influence upon it.

Who is Responsible to See that Something is Done?

This is a job for a group of concerned people to undertake. A committee on Christian Social Action in the congregation can be of real service here, learning the facts about the community in which the church is located, discovering where there are points of need and weakness, and then seeking to point out to the church ways in which it might serve those needs.

A book which can offer much aid at this point is *The Church in Community Action,* by Harvey Seifert, published by Abingdon-Cokesburg in 1952. There are many valuable passage in this book, but we draw special attention here to the appendix, which offers a brief "outline for a church-community survey." It can be used in either urban or rural situations.

For those who are prepared to make an even more thorough study than that proposed by Seifert we suggest the use of the new Russell Sage Foundation volume on *Studying Your Community.* Written by a sociologist, Professor Roland L. Warren of Alfred University, it will be of special value to social workers. But it will also be of much interest to church leaders who desire to analyze the various aspects of community organization.

This is a good "how to" book, full of questions which community and church leaders will find useful in gathering information. In 362 pages there are twenty chapters, most of which deal with subjects which are always of concern to churchmen. Some of the chapters suggest ways to discover, for example, the adequacy of housing in a community; the effectiveness of its educational facilities and of its government machinery; the structure of its economic life; the things which are being done for health and sanitation; the outreach of its institutions of religion; the provisions made for special groups, the handicapped, migrants, etc.; and things that are done in intergroup relations, affecting minority groups, discrimination, etc.

A good example of the usefulness of this approach to community problems is reported in a small book published by the Southern Regional Council several years ago. It is called *Greenville's Big Idea,* and it tells how church leaders in Greenville, South Carolina started a community study program which is now producing good results, following the development of a Christian conscience on a number of serious problems.

The influence of the church in the community can be a strong one. To make it count, however, it is important for congregational leaders every now and then to have an evaluation session and to "begin objectively looking at ourselves again."

SAVE THIS ISSUE!

With this issue, CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY begins a series of articles intended to help local congregations study and serve their communities more effectively. Each month will bring an article interpreting an area of concern, and an article relating how one specific congregation is endeavoring to meet its responsibility.

The Associate Secretary of the Commission on Christian Social Action, the Reverend F. Nelsen Schlegel, has prepared a general introduction to the series, on the theme "The Church in the Community." The "case study" is reported by the Reverend Laverne E. Ebert, pastor of Zion Church, St. Louis, which is a conspicuous example of an old established congregation which is venturing on new paths in serving its neighborhood. For good measure, we include a brief outline of twelve questions which might be asked by any church interested in discovering what its community needs.

Succeeding issues will deal with some of the specific needs which must be met, the people who require help, the causes which deserve support, and the evils which must be opposed.

These articles are offered as aids in the follow-up to the Emphasis on Christian Commitment and Christian Community. As suggested on page 23 of the Manual *Commitment for Christian Living,* it is recommended that in the period following Easter our congregations and pastors study their community with a view to planning a parish program that better meets its needs. Here is "first aid" in the process.

The Church Serves A Changing Community

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either rent or are buying a section of an old home, which, if not slum, is certainly run down. Both parents go to work in order to support their children, and the latter are left to the schools and their own pursuits for the rest of the working day. With over-crowded classrooms and problem pupils to require her individual attention, the teacher can teach no more than the minimum required of her. With a full time job, the mother cannot train or guide in the constructive use of an unusual amount of leisure time. It is partly this excessive and unsupervised leisure, and the time lag of two years between the age the law insists young people must attend school and the age at which they may work, to which we credit the gang of juvenile delinquents who at times "hang out" on Zion's corner. They come from careless families with little if any religious background and certainly no formal connections with a church.

This study of our church's relation to the community revealed that we could best start and extend our help to youth and children. We started by undergirding and strengthening established programs in the Church School, Youth Fellowship, Scouts, and Vacation Bible School with an eye open to the local community.

We looked for new methods of personal contacts, developed family visitation, sought meaningful curriculum, displayed interest and cooperated with the public schools and community agencies, extended weekday religious education classes. Groups of children playing aimlessly on the streets were invited to form clubs after school. As time progressed our program began to fit in with community needs. Referrals came our way from the public school teachers and we were able to assist with problem cases. Teachers ate lunch at our church on occasion; the school Mother's Club used our facilities; the school publicized our activities and looked to our church for leadership which they could not find for such extra-curricular activities as scouts and play.

Participants in the group activities program come from many religious groups: Evangelical and Reformed, Roman Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran, Pentecostal, and others. Many of these have only nominal affiliation, and about 19% are unchurched. Our leaders encourage church attendance; and the unchurched we consider our responsibility to cultivate at Zion.

Some of Zion's Neighbors

Lack of youthful leadership in the church is partly solved by a full-time community worker and three Eden Seminary students who teach in the Church school and lead a group work program of six boys and girls' clubs which meet in Zion House after the school across the street dismisses. Some of the clubs, Cubs, and Boy Scouts are led by church and community volunteers.

More than 100 children are effectively reached through this program which also forms strong favorable contact of the church with unchurched members; for just as basic as our wish to serve is our desire and need to bring new members to the Christian Fellowship. Already, after five years of this program, we see long-range effects; the growth of Sunday School and Vacation Church School more than make up for the continuing though slow decline of old member families; club contact is "foot in the door" of the unchurched parent through a common concern, the welfare of his child; participation of all in church fellowship, picnic, or family night, unites us in a wondrous way; the friendliness of our church provides warmth and neighborliness to an impersonal urban society where people seldom have or take time to make friends with those outside their walls; and, even in this short space of time, we can point to happier children and changed lives.

Our club leaders become aware of members' personal and group relations, their problems, family relations; their stage of Christian nurture, and the patterns of personality which are taking shape in their lives. They become aware of good and bad environmental factors in the community which mold the child for good or evil, and they point them out for action.

Recently families have begun occupying a large, low-income Housing Project four blocks from our church. Zion is one of the closest Protestant churches to the Project. A second-year Seminary student, the pastor, community worker, and lay visitors from the church will canvass the Project and invite citizens from this "City Within a City" to our fellowship. The statement "They can't support us financially," is no obstacle to our purpose—EVERY child of God committed to Him through Christ.

We are deeply humbled by the things we have not done and seemingly can't do, but we trust God for guidance. We have tried to keep abreast of our community needs and social responsibilities which affect our life in the local and world community. After five years in our program, a study committee met last night to begin objectively looking at ourselves again. We pray that from such study and prayer we may be more worthy servants of the Master.

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